

NEW BIRDS FOR THE STATE OF KANSAS

BY RICHARD AND JEAN GRABER

W. S. LONG, in his useful "Check-List of Kansas Birds" (1940:433), clearly pointed out the need for further field work in the western part of the State. Because of this, and also because George M. Sutton and his colleagues had recently found so much of ornithological interest in western Oklahoma, we visited the southwestern corner of Kansas for three and a half months (February 13 to May 27) in 1950, finding that the western-southwestern element in the avifauna was much more pronounced than had heretofore been realized. We collected at several localities in Meade, Morton, and Hamilton Counties. This region was semi-arid and flat for the most part. The lesser tributaries to the larger streams were completely dry most of the time. These lesser tributaries were called 'canyons', locally. Their banks were often precipitous, sometimes 50 feet high. The principal trees of the region were cottonwoods (*Populus* sp.) and these grew only along the streams.

Most of the specimens mentioned in this paper were collected in Morton County along the Cimarron River 8 miles south of Richfield. Here the river bed was about a quarter of a mile wide and completely dry. On either bank was an extensive stand of large, scattered cottonwoods, bordered by thickets of small cottonwoods, willows (*Salix* sp.) and *Tamarix*. Thickets of skunk-bush (*Schmaltzia trilobata* of Britton and Brown, 1913:483) grew on the north bank above these woods. Near the east end of the woods was a small cattail marsh, and along the periphery were several small water holes. We were in Morton County February 21–March 12, March 21–24, April 22–May 15, and May 19–27; in Hamilton County March 13–20, April 10–21, and May 16–18; and in Meade County the rest of the time.

During the course of our study we collected 12 birds not heretofore taken in Kansas, as well as one species believed to have been extirpated some time ago. This paper summarizes our data pertaining to the 13 above-mentioned forms. We identified our specimens at the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, using the excellent comparative material in the Peet and Sutton collections as well as in the Museum collection itself.

We wish to acknowledge the fine cooperation of the State Forest, Fish and Game Commission, whose representatives, Director Dave Leahy, Superintendent Harry Smith of the Meade State Game Farm, and District Game Protector Ed Gebhard of Meade County, did all they could to help us. George Attwood, of the U. S. Soil Conservation Station in Morton County kindly gave us permission to collect on Station lands. Walter Posey of Elkhart helped in many ways to make our trip profitable. Especially do we wish to thank Dr. C. W. Hibbard for helping us in many ways, and Robert M. Mengel for identifying our *Empidonax* specimens.

Dendrocopos scalaris. Ladder-backed Woodpecker.

This species is fairly common in Morton County among cottonwoods 8 miles south of Richfield. We first encountered it February 26, when we saw a pair near the old Wilburton bridge and succeeded in securing the female. Between this date and May 20 we noted the species 9 times (collecting two females and a male on March 9 and a male on March 22) in a seven-mile stretch of the Cimarron between Wilburton and Elkhart bridges. On May 9 an excited female which probably had a nest allowed us to approach closely and refused to leave a certain part of the woods.

Though our five specimens are all from Morton County, this woodpecker probably ranges considerably farther north and east in the State. It has been reported in Colorado as far north as Pueblo County (Cooke, 1898:162), and in Oklahoma as far east as Ellis, Kiowa, and Tillman Counties (Nice, 1931:115; Sutton, 1936:432). We have compared our specimens with topotypical *cactophilus* and almost topotypical *symplectus* in the Sutton collection and decided, largely on the basis of the lightness of the under parts and breadth of the white bars on the back, that they are closer to *symplectus*. We are, of course, aware of Todd's expressed belief (1946:312-313) that *symplectus* is a synonym of *cactophilus*, but *symplectus* appears to us to be a whiter race.

Tyrannus vociferans. Cassin's Kingbird.

On May 14 near the south bank of the Cimarron River, 10 miles south of Richfield, we came upon a lone kingbird perched in a dead shrub in a large weedy pasture. We identified it as this species, but failed to secure it. On May 19, we saw two more Cassin's Kingbirds sitting on the sand in the middle of the dry bed of the Cimarron. They did not leave this open area, but were wary and stayed out of gun-range. On May 26, we encountered two pairs on the weedy slopes of low hills overlooking the north bank of the Cimarron near the Elkhart bridge, and succeeded in collecting a male (testes much enlarged).

Myiarchus cinerascens. Ash-throated Flycatcher.

Noted only among large cottonwoods along the Cimarron in Morton County, south of Richfield. Here we saw and heard one bird May 5, collected a female (ovary somewhat enlarged) May 7, and encountered one bird or a pair on each of four occasions May 8-23. The species seemed to prefer partial clearings in which there was some dead or fallen timber.

Empidonax wrightii. Wright's Flycatcher.

Of the 13 flycatchers of the genus *Empidonax* which we collected among the cottonwoods and willows 8 miles south of Richfield, seven proved to be *traillii*, three *minimus*, and three *wrightii*. The *wrightii* we took on May 8 (male and female) and 12 (male). In none of these were the gonads noticeably enlarged.

Corvus cryptoleucus. White-necked Raven.

Though alleged to have been extirpated many years ago (see Long, 1940:448; Goodrich, 1945:247; and A.O.U. Check-List, 1931, p. 226), this corvid is probably a fairly common summer resident today on the high plains of western Kansas. Game Protector Gebhard told us he had seen the species regularly in summer at least since 1941, in which year he had found it nesting on old windmill towers on the high plains of Hamilton and Kearney Counties. C. O. Shetterly of Syracuse told us he had been seeing the birds in summer (not in winter) since 1931. We first encountered the species (a pair) 13 miles north of Syracuse, Hamilton County. We saw the two birds clearly and heard them calling. When we returned to this area on April 18 we saw at least 19 birds, and collected one (a male with enlarged testes). One of two old nests we had observed earlier was being relined.

Our friend Robert M. Mengel, who travelled through Kansas this past summer, informs us that on August 21 he saw a flock of about 100 White-necked Ravens near the place at which we collected our specimen.

Vireo solitarius plumbeus. Plumbeous Solitary Vireo.

Vireo s. solitarius has long been known to migrate through Kansas, but of the 5 specimens of Solitary Vireo taken by us in Morton County, 8 miles south of Richfield, not one was *solitarius*. Four were *plumbeus* and one was *cassini*. The *plumbeus* we took May 8 (male and female), May 9 (singing male), and May 10 (female). In all of these the gonads were somewhat enlarged, but we did not find a nest.

Vireo solitarius cassini. Cassin's Solitary Vireo.

A female (ovary slightly enlarged) Solitary Vireo which we collected 8 miles south of Richfield clearly belongs to this dull colored western race.

Vermivora virginiae. Virginia's Warbler.

We encountered this species only in Morton County, in low cottonwoods 8 miles south of Richfield. We noted it May 4-10, always in mixed flocks of migrating warblers. We saw one on May 4, one (male collected) on May 6, two on May 8 (one collected, a male), and one on May 10.

Dendroica nigrescens. Black-throated Gray Warbler.

We found this warbler quite common between May 8 and 13, during which period we collected three females and a male. We encountered the species mainly in thickets of young cottonwoods and other scrubby trees along the Cimarron in Morton County.

Dendroica townsendi. Townsend's Warbler.

Noted on May 3, 11, and 20, on each date a single bird in woods along the Cimarron, 8 miles south of Richfield. Our only specimen, a female collected May 3, was with a company of Orange-crowned Warblers (*Vermivora celata*).

Piranga ludoviciana. Western Tanager.

This bird we saw many times May 2 to 26 (the end of our stay) and came to regard it as a fairly common transient. On May 6, 8 miles south of Richfield, we collected two males from a mixed flock of Bullock's Orioles (*Icterus bullockii*) and Western Tanagers. So far as we have been able to ascertain, *Piranga ludoviciana* has not actually been collected in Kansas heretofore, though Long (1940:453) called the species a rare summer resident in the west and stated that there were two published records for the State.

Chlorura chlorura. Green-tailed Towhee.

We first encountered this species on April 25, when we collected a beautiful male (testes somewhat enlarged) in a canyon opening into the north bank of the Cimarron River in Morton County, about 9 miles north and 3 west of Elkhart. The floors and walls of the canyons in this region were upgrown with *Schmaltzia*, and it was in a dense growth of this shrub that we found the bird. It was associating with Spotted Towhees (*Pipilo maculatus*). The following day we collected another male in the same canyon. We saw three other birds (the last on May 23), in thickets at the edge of extensive woodlands farther east along the Cimarron.

Aimophila ruficeps. Rufous-crowned Sparrow.

On May 21 we saw a Rufous-crowned Sparrow near Point Rock in Morton County, about 9 miles north and 2 miles west of Elkhart. The bird was on the floor of a wide draw, along the sides of which grew sparse clumps of *Schmaltzia*. The bird sought cover in this shrubbery, and we did not see it again.

Spizella breweri breweri. Brewer's Sparrow.

Brewer's Sparrow apparently is a common spring migrant in southwestern Kansas. We noted it throughout Morton County, encountering it first on April 8, when we collected a male (testes very small) in a dense clump of *Schmaltzia* along a rocky ledge above the Cimarron River. We recorded it on five dates thereafter, collecting three more specimens, all males with considerably enlarged testes, the last on May 1. The species inhabited canyons, sage pastures

and the edges of woods but never strayed far from dense, shrubby cover. Twice we saw it along roadside fences.

On the basis of size our specimens are referable to the nominate race, though two of them (R.R.G. 425 and 465) are rather dark on the dorsum for that form. These two measure, respectively: wing 64, 63 mm.; tail, 60, 60. The other two (R.R.G. 360 and 435) measure: wing, 64, 62; tail, 60, 58.

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